

Allergies & Asthma: Nothing to Sneeze At



It is spring in Kentucky and we all know what that means – allergies. Anyone who doesn't have an allergy doesn't realize how significant the effects of this disease can be or how wide reaching. It is among the country's most common, yet often overlooked, diseases. There are no cures for allergies, but they can be managed with preventive

measures and treatment.

Allergies are an immune system reaction to substances, such as dust, foods, molds, pollens, animals and cosmetics to name a few. Our body produces antibodies to defuse these substances, which trigger the release of histamines and other chemicals that produce an allergic reaction.

People who have a family history of asthma and allergies are at greater risk for developing the same conditions. In fact, the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America reports that due to the genetic component in allergies, one parent having allergies of any type leads to a 1 in 3 chance that each child will have an allergy. If both parents have allergies, chances are 7 in 10. More Americans than ever before are saying they are suffering from allergies.

Therefore, they are more likely to suffer from similar triggers. Overall, people who suffer from allergic symptoms or asthma are sensitive to specific allergens or triggers. These triggers can be numerous and include simple things like:



- Tobacco and other smoke
- Perfume, paint or hair spray
- Any strong scented agents
- Dust mites, pollen, molds, pollution
- Animal dander (Approximately 10 million people are allergic to cat dander, the most common pet allergy.)
- Common cold, influenza, and other respiratory illnesses

In order to better monitor your allergies, it is helpful to keep a log of your reactions in order to identify your triggers. This will help you to avoid future exposure, so that you can eliminate or reduce your attacks.

Most common allergy symptoms:



- Clear runny nose or mucus
- Sneezing
- Stuffy nose
- Itchy and runny eyes
- Sluggishness
- Hives, wheals or rash
- Asthma

Tips for Reducing Triggers

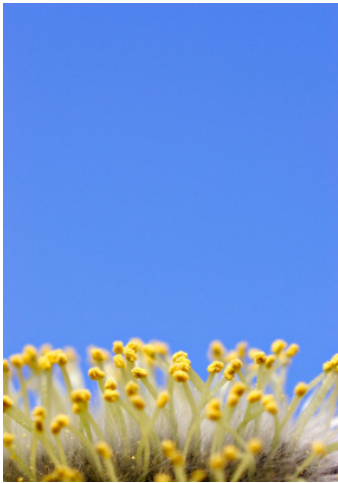
Avoiding the allergen can be sensible, but not always practical. We cannot live in isolation or control weather conditions or seasons, but we can make practical applications and very simple lifestyle adjustments to help us breathe easier. Avoiding or lessening your exposure is the first line of defense:

- When pollen levels are high, stay indoors with the doors and windows closed, using an air conditioner.
- Try wearing a mask when going outside in these conditions or while doing gardening. If you must go outside try to avoid the time of day when allergens are at their peak (5 a.m. to 10 a.m.).
- Shower after spending time outside to wash away pollen that collects on your skin and hair.
- Delegate lawn mowing, weed pulling and other gardening chores that stir up pollen and molds.
- Try to stay inside on dry, windy days. It's best to go outside just after a good rain has washed the pollen from the air.
- Know the pollen and pollution levels by checking the paper, TV or Web links.
- Use the air conditioner in your car as well, keeping the windows closed.
- Use a dehumidifier to reduce indoor humidity. Levels less than 50% will deter mold growth.
- Use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter in your bedroom and keep windows closed at night.
- Use allergy proof covers on mattresses, box springs and pillows.
- Wash sheets and blankets in hot water.
- Vacuum carpets at least once a week and consider leaving the house for a couple of hours after cleaning to let the dust particles settle.
- Consider removing carpeting, especially where you sleep.

- Reduce pet dander. If you have allergies, you should avoid pets with feathers or fur like birds, dogs and cats. If you can not bear to part with your pet, you should at least keep it out of the bedroom. Bathing pets weekly helps to reduce saliva and dander in the home.
- Avoid mold spores. Mold spores grow in moist areas. If you reduce the moisture in the bathroom and kitchen, you will reduce the mold. Fix any leaks inside and outside of your home and clean moldy surfaces. Plants can carry pollen and mold too, so limit the number of houseplants in the home.

Understanding Airborne Allergens

Airborne allergens populate the air through pollination. Most pollens that become triggers for allergies are produced by plain plants like grass, trees and shrubs whose pollen is light enough to be carried on a light breeze. Molds act in a similar fashion by producing spores which are also released into the air.



When both types of particles are released in mass quantities, depending on the season, allergy symptoms intensify. The prevalence of nasal allergies in the United States has prompted the measuring of pollen and mold spore counts, reported by the National Allergy Bureau since 1992. [Keep track of the pollen count in your area.](#) 🌿.

If you are a die-hard gardener who suffers from allergies, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology offers some very comprehensive information that may help strike a balance between your allergies and your desire to garden. Find out which plants are identified as triggers and which plants are [alternative seedlings](#) for gardeners. 🌿

Looking Out for Food Allergies



Food allergies vary and reactions can range from very mild to life-threatening. Ninety percent of all food allergies are triggered by 8 foods: milk, soy, eggs, wheat, peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish. Here are a few mild to moderate symptoms:

- Itchiness – eyes and nose
- Rash or hives, may appear all over the body
- Watery and running – eyes and nose
- Recurrent earaches or headaches
- Queasiness or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Some foods can cause a life-threatening reaction such as a swelling of the mouth, throat, and bronchial tubes which can impede breathing, as well as causing wheezing or a person to faint. Symptoms can include generalized hives and/or swollen face. It is highly recommended that you treat these symptoms as an emergency. Contact your physician or call 911 immediately.

Remember that allergic reactions may progress from mild to severe, so it is important that you keep track of any reactions and take necessary steps to prevent further exposure. Get the scoop on [food allergies](#). 🐛

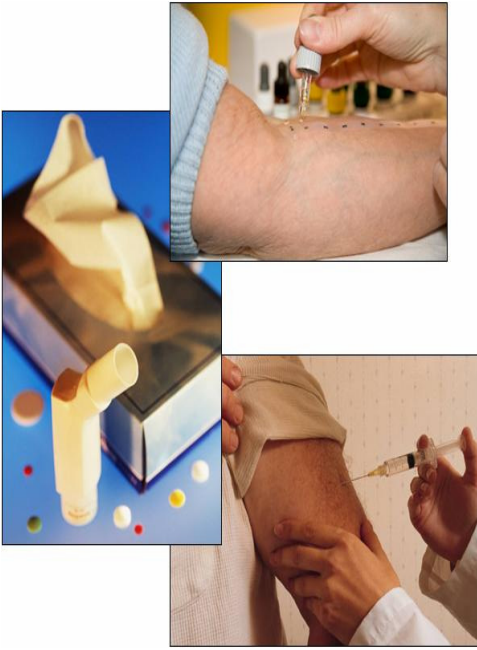
Insects Can Be More Than Pests



Bugs, bugs and more bugs can cause an allergic reaction too. Wasps, honey bees, hornets, yellow jackets and ants are the insects most likely to cause immediate allergic reactions. Some biting insects, such as mosquitoes, flies, chiggers and lice can cause allergic reactions since their saliva is injected into the bloodstream when they bite.

Symptoms can range from normal to severe. Common symptoms are redness, swelling, itching and mild pain. Depending upon the number of bites or stings and the level of sensitivity of the victim, the symptoms can include muscle cramps, headache, fever and drowsiness or the inability to breathe. Contact a health care professional if any of these symptoms progress in severity. Catch the buzz on [insect allergies](#). 🐛

Options: Tests, Injections & Medications




Blood tests can be done by your physician or allergist to determine your reaction to allergens. In addition, "scratch" tests are given on your skin with the liquid dropping of the possible identified allergen for a reaction. These tests are among the few standardized test for allergies. Once your susceptibility has been determined and asthma/allergy diagnosed, your physician may suggest allergy shots in addition to the usual prescription or non-prescription medication for asthma or allergies.

These drugs can be quite expensive to your pocketbook on a monthly basis with a co-payment. It can be cost-effective to use generics or over-the-counter equivalents to reduce cost while getting the same results. Discuss these options with your physician so you can start feeling better today and enjoy the beautiful spring weather.

Things to Know About ASTHMA

Asthma is a disease that affects the lungs. With 20 million Americans who suffer from this disease, it is one of the most common long-term diseases, especially in children. Wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness and coughing are recurrent symptoms and can range from mild to severe progressing into full blown asthma attacks. Chronic asthma produces acute symptoms on a regular basis, but can be managed by medications and avoidance of triggers.

The American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology has developed a self-test to assist individuals in determining whether they have allergies and/or asthma, to what degree and what the triggers might be. This [self-test](#)  is designed to be taken on line, scored, printed and taken with you to your doctor for discussion.

[Learn more](#) about asthma. 

Drug Allergies - A Hard Pill to Swallow



Six percent of individuals suffering from allergies have an identified reaction to a specific drug. When the immune system overreacts to a drug, allergic reactions can occur with varied severity and symptoms, but not all adverse reactions can be classified as allergic. The American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology has an excellent reference guide with [Tips to Remember: Adverse reactions to medications and drug allergy.](#)

Resources

General information was compiled for this article from the following sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

American Lung Association

"The Allergy Report, Volume 1", The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, Inc., 2000, <http://www.aaaai.org/ar/volume1.pdf>

"Springtime allergies: Solutions for a problem in full bloom" MayoClinic.com, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/springtime-allergies/AA00060>

"Allergy Overview-What Causes Allergies.", The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, <http://www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=9&cont=79>

"Allergy Overview-Treatment.", The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, <http://www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=9&cont=81>

"Allergy Overview-Prevention.", The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, <http://www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=9&cont=82>

"Food Allergies and Reactions", The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, http://www.aaaai.org/patients/resources/easy_reader/food.pdf

"Spring Fever: Great For the Soul but Tough Times for Asthma & Allergies", The American Lung Association
<http://www.lungusa.org/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=dvLUK9o0E&b=34851&ct=2071657>

"Selective Seeding can Lessen Sneezing", Spring Allergies & Asthma Survival Guide, American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology,
http://www.aaaai.org/springallergy/selective_seeding_can_lessen.stm 🐾

American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology,
<http://www.acaai.org/public/lifeQuality/nasp/tests/LQtest.htm> 🐾

"Understanding Allergic Asthma", American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology,
http://www.aaaai.org/springallergy/understanding_allergic_asthma.stm 🐾

"Colds vs. Allergies", American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology,
http://www.aaaai.org/springallergy/colds_vsallergies.stm 🐾

"Double Trouble: the Link between Allergies and Asthma", MayoClinic.com,
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/allergies-and-asthma/AA00045> 🐾